

Forces in order to protect our country and our freedom. They don't ask for much, but we ask so much of them.

That is why we must meet our commitment to them by passing this Veterans and Military Construction funding measure as soon as possible. This bill will increase critical resources to help ensure veterans receive health care and the health benefits they rely on. It will improve quality of life on military bases for soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and their families. It will support critical national security projects such as missile defense. It is a bipartisan measure that earned the support of both Democrats and Republicans when it passed the Senate. So let's work together today and pass it again.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

#### ZIKA VIRUS AND VA-MILCON FUNDING BILL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I don't know what planet my friend the Republican leader is living on. This conference report is the most irresponsible legislation I have ever seen in my 34 years in Congress. That says a lot. I can't think of anything that is close.

This Zika threat is real. It is serious. Every day more and more Americans are being infected. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, right now 2,900 Americans have already contracted Zika. There were 700 just last week alone who were added to that list. It was 2,200, and now it is 2,900, and 481 women have been tested positive for the virus in the United States. Eight pregnancies in the United States have resulted in severe birth defects because of Zika, and when we talk about severe birth defects, we mean it. They have little shrunk heads and their skulls are caved in. Mosquitoes have caused problems forever, but never like this.

In spite of all the evidence of Zika's harm to the American people, Republicans are pushing the conference report as nothing more than the goodie bag for the fringes of the Republican Party. In April, very recently, the Republican leader told reporters:

We are all very much aware that this is a serious crisis. . . . We'll be working with the administration, with the Democrats.

That simply hasn't proven to be true. On the conference committee the Democrats were locked out of negotiations. Then they jammed through this bill. When I say in the middle of the night, it was in the middle of the night. It was during the time they had the sit-in on the House floor. Chaos was there. There was no debate, no discussion. It was just ruled there by the Presiding Officer. It shortchanged the President's request by \$800 million. It

took another \$100 million from the Ebola funding, which is badly needed. All you have to do is talk to anyone at NIH or the Centers for Disease Control, and they will tell you. Ebola is not gone.

Then they proceeded. I don't know if they sat in a room and said: Let's do everything we can just to hit every constituency group the American people like, and let's just poke in their eyes. That is what they did.

How about women's health? How anti-women's health can they make it? I will tell you that we are dealing here with pregnant women and women who want some type of birth control. The Republican conference report restricts funding for birth control provided by Planned Parenthood. My friend says they can go someplace else for it. In America today, there are huge segments of the American people where this is the only place they can go for help. Women need Planned Parenthood, and what do the Republicans do because of their fixation on doing everything they can to hurt Planned Parenthood? They do these phony television interviews. They have fake cameras. The courts have decided that what they did is wrong. They have been sued, but that is OK. Anything they can do to whack Planned Parenthood, they are going to do it, and they tried it here.

How about ObamaCare? They have tried to revoke it almost 70 times, and it didn't work. So what do they do? They just rescind \$543 million dollars and stick it in the conference report. I guess that was just to get the President's attention. Of course he is going to veto this, but they wanted to make sure he was going to have something really substantive in order to do it.

How about the environment? Remember that what we are trying to—in addition to all of the things we have talked about—is that we want to make sure there is a way of getting rid of these pests—these mosquitoes. How do they do that? The only way we have found that is really effective is with spraying to kill these little varmints, these insects. Well, what do the Republicans do? They exempt pesticide spraying from the Clean Water Act. Why? Just because they don't like the EPA. They don't like the Clean Water Act. It has been around for 60 years, and they still don't like it.

How about this? We know the Democrats have a big constituency with veterans. Why not whack them? OK. Let's do that. What we will do is take \$500 million out of veterans health. That should get the Democrats' attention.

They couldn't stop themselves from coming up with every idea. I guess they were waiting around while the chaos was happening on the House floor, saying: Can we think of anything else that would just be really good to do?

I have it. Why don't we rescind the order that is in effect saying you can't fly the Confederate flag on military cemeteries?

Great idea—OK, I am glad you came up with that. We are going to stick that in there too.

Under this legislation the Republicans stuck in there a line to prohibit the legislation that says you can't fly a Confederate flag in a military cemetery. Under their legislation, you can go ahead and do it.

This conference report is disgraceful. It is shameful to use a real-life public health crisis to push the radical Republican agenda. It is radical. I have told you what they are doing.

There is a point of order against the bill also. We could raise that.

Republicans were eager to inject politics in this legislation, even rescinding \$543 million from the Affordable Care Act, making the bill rescindable. For these and other reasons, we are going to vote against cloture.

But it is not just Democrats saying this bill is a disaster. No, don't leave it to us.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a letter from 40 public health care groups, including some of these radical organizations like the March of Dimes, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Easterseals, the American Public Health Association, and 35 more.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

JUNE 28, 2016.

Hon. MITCH MCCONNELL,  
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate,  
Washington, DC.

Hon. PAUL D. RYAN,  
Speaker, House of Representatives,  
Washington, DC.

Hon. HARRY REID,  
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate,  
Washington, DC.

Hon. NANCY PELOSI,  
Minority Leader, House of Representatives,  
Washington, DC.

DEAR SPEAKER RYAN, MINORITY LEADER PELOSI, MAJORITY LEADER MCCONNELL, AND MINORITY LEADER REID: The undersigned organizations committed to the health and wellbeing of our nation's children and families would like to express our dismay at Congress' failure to produce bipartisan legislation to provide federal agencies, states and localities with the funds necessary to combat Zika virus.

Let us be clear: Zika is a public health emergency. It is increasingly likely that pregnant women in the U.S. will be infected with Zika this summer and give birth to infants with devastating, preventable birth defects next year.

The conference committee should reconvene immediately to craft a new bill that:

Provides appropriate funding levels for all aspects of Zika response, including contraception for women who wish to avoid pregnancy, and to prevent the sexual transmission of Zika;

Does not draw funds from other important public health priorities, including Ebola efforts;

Does not place unreasonable restrictions on Zika funding, which would hinder the ability of agencies to respond to the virus given that its course is unpredictable;

Lays a foundation with FY2016 funding that can be built upon responsibly in subsequent fiscal years, since Zika will be a long-term challenge; and